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AUTHOR Lee, Lisa; Seiderman, Ethel

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ABSTRACT

The Families Matter series of papers from the Harvard Family Research Project advances the concept of family-centered child care, advocating an approach to early childhood education that addresses the development of the child and family together. Grounded in family support principles, which build on family strengths and work from a community's culture and resources, family-centered child care incorporates positive attitudes about working with parents and practical activities to serve the family. Asserting that a key place to promote widespread use of family support principles and practices is through the child care training system, the papers that make up the series focus on how the child care field trains providers to include family support. This paper briefly outlines the history of the Parent Services Project (PSP), a nationally renowned child care training program that is based on the beliefs that caring for children requires caring for families and that family support strengthens both parents and community. The paper then summarizes PSP's main teaching points and training methodology. It analyzes the components of effective training and presents PSP's core principles of family support and strategies for working with families. After describing PSP's approach to parent involvement and the shift in values required for providers to deliver family-supportive child care, the paper concludes with a discussion of how to handle the challenges and issues raised by family support implementation. (EV)

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FAMILIES MATTER

The Parent Services Project

Lisa Lee and Ethel Seiderman

HARVARD FAMILY RESEARCH PROJECT

PS 027946

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The Parent Services Project

Lisa Lee and Ethel Selderman

HARVARD FAMILY RESEARCH PROJECT
CAMBRIDGE, MA
1998

HARVARD FAMILY RESEARCH PROJECT
38 Concord Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138

TEL: 617-495-9108
FAX: 617-495-8594
EMAIL: HFRP@hugse1.harvard.edu
WWW: http://hugse1.harvard.edu/~hfrp

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HARVARD FAMILY RESEARCH PROJECT
Founded in 1983 by Dr. Heather Weiss, the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) is today at the center of a national movement to strengthen and support American families. HFRP's pathbreaking research provides practitioners, researchers, and policymakers with timely, insightful information about effective family support initiatives.

Disseminating its research widely, HFRP links people, programs, ideas, and resources together to create innovative family support programs and services and family-sustaining policies. HFRP's research helps states create systems to monitor and assess programs and services, and helps communities better integrate family support services in neighborhood programs. Using HFRP data, schools are learning more about the specific benefits of parent involvement and the best strategies for successfully engaging the entire family. HFRP's research findings are enabling practitioners to design culturally appropriate programs, and helping training and education programs effectively prepare teachers to work with families.

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PREFACE

The Families Matter series of papers advances the concept of family-centered child care, advocating an approach to early childhood education that addresses the development of the child and family together. Grounded in family support principles which build on family strengths and work from a community's culture and resources, family-centered child care incorporates positive attitudes about working with parents and practical activities to serve the family.

A key place to promote widespread use of family support principles and practices is through the child care training system. This system reaches many types of providers and greatly influences their attitudes and practices. In addition, training sets professional norms and standards -- and could guide the child care field to emphasize family support in the definition of quality child care.

The papers that make up the series focus on how the child care field trains providers to include family support. The papers present both a systemic view of child care training as well as hands-on experiences in training child care providers and delivering family-supportive child care. An accompanying Resource Guide for Family-Centered Child Care offers an annotated bibliography of training materials that child care providers and trainers can use to improve their efforts to support families.

While they write from distinct perspectives, each author in this series endorses the need for integrating family support and child care training. The authors concede that there are structural and other challenges to training child care providers to deliver family support, yet they share a wealth of insights on how to accomplish change.

Each paper includes a description of how family support fits into the child care arena and suggests specific content for family support training. Acknowledging that it can be difficult to integrate family support practices into child care settings, each paper discusses the major challenges to establishing family-supportive child care programs and provides strategies and action steps to make family support part of child care training and delivery. More specifically, Families Matter covers the following topics:

- An outline of the structure of the child care delivery and training systems and an analysis of the problems posed by fragmentation on quality standards, career development, and incorporating a family support approach.
- A summary of family support training and credentialing initiatives, as well as alternative training models to address the fragmented training system characteristic of both the child care and family support fields.
- A description of training provided by a program that focuses on the "hard issues" in the parent-provider relationship and ways to overcome barriers to parent participation.
- A "how to" guide on preparing providers to work with families that are culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse and strategies to promote family involvement in the child care program.

HFRP believes that an improved child care training system that integrates family support principles and advances a logical, progressive path for professional development will lead to higher quality front-line practice. If the barriers to integrating family support and child care can be overcome, we will have a substantially stronger system of early childhood services that is better able to enhance the development of children by including their families in the learning process.

The Parent Services Project

The Parent Services Project (PSP) is a nationally renowned child care training program that is based on the beliefs that caring for children requires caring for families and that family support strengthens both parents and the community. This paper briefly outlines the history of PSP and then summarizes PSP's main teaching points and training methodology. It analyzes the components of effective training and presents PSP's core principles of family support and strategies for working with families. After describing PSP's approach to parent involvement and the shift in values required for providers to deliver family-supportive child care, the paper concludes with a discussion of how to handle the challenges and issues raised by family support implementation.

This study was a collaborative effort. HFRP is grateful to Kate Wrean for her editing of the reports in this series. The following HFRP staff members provided much-appreciated help with the production of this report: Atissa Banuazizi, Sybilla Dorros, Ann Hannum, Holly Kreider, Phuong Le, M. Elena Lopez, Maura Pelham, and Scott Wilder.

Heather B. Weiss
Director
Harvard Family Research Project

LISA LEE

Lisa Lee is the Associate Director of and a trainer for the Parent Services Project, Inc., a national nonprofit organization which provides training and technical assistance to integrate family support principles, practices, and services into early childhood settings. Ms. Lee has twenty years' experience working in early childhood programs, including ten years in the Asian community as the director of bilingual and intergenerational child development programs for Wu Yee Children's Services in San Francisco.

ETHEL SEIDERMAN

Ethel Seiderman is the executive director of the Parent Services Project, Inc. Ms. Seiderman provides national leadership for the Parent Services Project National Network and oversees expansion of the family support approach in early childhood and school ages sites. She is engaged in training, replication, dissemination, and advocacy efforts to integrate family support principles and practices into systems serving children and families on a national level. The PSP approach has been integrated into over 300 programs nationwide and over 60 child development sites in California.

MOVING FROM CHILD- TO FAMILY-CENTERED CHILD CARE

CARING FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Quality child care is a critical support service for a growing majority of families and will continue to be in the twenty-first century. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children's 1990 National Day Care Survey, 40 percent of children of working families spend time in a child care center, in family child care, or with an in-home caregiver,[1] a trend that has shown no sign of diminishing. The availability of child care is a key factor in making economic gain possible for working parents and their communities.

Child care is a natural arena in which to integrate a family support approach. A nexus for families of all socioeconomic, racial, and cultural backgrounds, child care touches the lives of millions of families daily. Moreover, the urgency of employment and economic survival brings families into the child care environment very early in the lives of their children, an opportune time for prevention and promotion efforts to have significant impact.

In quality child care programs, families develop a sense of trust for those who care for their children. Families, staff, and children share the small details of their lives. In addition, families build connections with one another due to the relationships among their children — today it is often easier to get to know parents of the children one's child plays with in a child care center than a neighbor down the street. Thus, ideally, the center becomes a familiar, comfortable, and stable environment, a place to establish warm relationships and foster a sense of community. In this atmosphere family support fits naturally, without seeming to be artificially imposed.

1. Willer, B., Hofferth, S. L., Kisker E., Divine-Hawkins, P., Farguar, E., & Glantz, F.B. (1991). *The demand and supply of child care in 1990: Joint findings from the National Child Care Survey 1990 and a Profile of Child Care Settings.* Washington, D.C.: National Association of the Education of Young Children.

Historically, early childhood care and intervention programs have recognized the importance of the family to the child. Early intervention programs typically included a major parent education component. Head Start was a pioneer in placing parents in decision-making roles to determine program services. Model Head Start programs such as Home Start, Parent Child Centers, and the Child and Family Resource Program affirmed the family as the primary childrearing system.[2] The parent co-op movement viewed parents as learners, volunteer staff gaining understanding about child development through active participation in the classroom alongside a mentoring teacher. Parents assumed tasks that enhanced their children's learning environment and experience. The movement aimed to build parents' skills through training in parenting, thereby increasing their sense of competence as parents. Each of these programs successfully achieved the goal of linking the care of children and family support.

Today, the challenge lies in reaching agreement on family support practices universally applicable to the child care setting and spreading within the child care field the lessons learned from working with families. For over 15 years, the Parent Services Project (PSP) has been working to unify child care and family support through its training program that focuses on teaching child care centers to provide family support. The PSP program encourages child care teachers to embrace family support principles and helps them grapple with the challenges of making family-centered child care a reality.

This paper presents a hands-on view of how PSP trains child care teachers to incorporate family support principles into the child care setting. It lists PSP's core principles of family support and gives strategies for working with parents. It also describes PSP's outlook on parent involvement and the program's "menu of services" approach. Adopting family support requires a shift in values, which is clarified by PSP's training methodology. The paper discusses the components of effective training as well as ways of handling the challenges and hard issues raised by family support implementation.

2. Associate Control, Research and Analysis, Inc. (1980). *A Handbook for Involving Parents in Head Start* (p. 5). Washington, D.C.: Head Start Bureau, Administration for Children, Youth and Families.

STRENGTHS OF FAMILY-SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

PSP promotes the belief that parents are the most important people in children's lives. Therefore, one of the teacher's roles is to foster the bond between parents and their children, connecting parents with what takes place during the day when the parents and children are apart. Hearing about the events of each day enables parents to find out about and reflect on the accomplishments of their children; it also enables them to feel pride in their children's success. Thus the teacher serves as a source of stability, building sound relationships with parents, which provide continuity between center and home.

The PSP experience shows that the ability of a center to integrate family support relates directly to its willingness to create partnerships between parents and child care teachers. By establishing parent-teacher relationships based on mutual respect, all players feel themselves engaged in the well-being of the family and the success of the children in the center. Linking family support and child care also benefits the caregiver. When teachers are open to seeing parents as assets, they discover resources that might otherwise remain untapped, and together they can channel their energies into activities for positive change.

PSP encourages child care programs to realize their potential to become supportive communities. Families join with staff to co-develop family support services based on the interests and needs of parents and teachers as individuals and adults with family responsibilities. Families and teachers both enrich the program by sharing their own skills and interests. When parents and teachers share ideas, feelings, and experiences, they develop empathy for one another and genuinely celebrate each other's successes. Teachers and parents forge new relationships, decreasing isolation and separation between them. Communication improves and becomes easier because all stakeholders are clear about their intention: to work together, combining the strengths everyone brings to the effort.

Thus, in promoting family support, PSP takes the natural next step in broadening the concept of quality early child care. Instead of just being caretakers of children, PSP asks child care teachers also to be partners with families in their children's development; instead of merely being residents of communities, PSP challenges teachers to be participants in communities that care for families.

THE PARENT SERVICES PROJECT

The Parent Services Project began in 1980 as a demonstration project to provide family activities and social support services at four child care centers serving 400 families in California. PSP was created as a way to test models of preventive social support for families under stress. It emphasized the value of parent control and leadership; parents and teachers were given considerable freedom to develop programs suited to the specific needs and the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the parents involved. It also focused on partnership and equity between teachers and parents. Teachers were encouraged to work effectively with families of diverse backgrounds, affirming family strengths, voluntarism, and the importance of peer networks. By 1982, PSP had expanded to eight sites serving 700 families. Growth was balanced by careful evaluation of program intent and design.

By 1988, the success of the community-based pilot program had led to a demand for out-of-state replication of PSP's inservice family support training methodology. With foundation support, a team of practitioners and parents from the original sites identified the key elements driving the success of their family support programs. Then, using a peer-to-peer approach in which they explained the program and mentored trainees, the California-based trainers conducted an initial training for teams from Florida's Child Care Connection. The Child Care Connection, a central agency chosen by the funder to replicate the PSP approach, then began to build the capacity of its own trainers to deliver PSP training and technical assistance throughout the state.

In the years since, a variety of types of child care centers in Delaware, Georgia, Mississippi, and New York have successfully replicated the PSP approach. As in Florida, they repeated the information transfer process in which California-based PSP representatives build a core of PSP expertise within a state, relying on that core to provide training and technical assistance to new PSP sites. In fact, since its inception, PSP has trained staff and parent teams from more than 500 organizations, programs that collectively touch over 19,000 families in center-based, school-based, home-based, and Head Start child care settings.

Although the training has evolved, it has retained its grassroots nature – providers and parents join together as willing participants for change. It also has retained its community character, encouraging individual child care centers and teachers to build relationships with each other in order to share their experiences and insights.

Reflecting on more than 15 years of working to provide family support services in state-subsidized child care, Janet DuBois-Mars, Executive Director of Marin County Child Development Programs in California, notes:

> There is great satisfaction in seeing work get done that has a flavor of partnership and harmony. Families feel such a part of our centers that many times it is difficult to say who is staff and who is parent. Most wonderfully, this work creates programs based on parents deciding what it is they need. Parents become active leaders and participants in the planning and implementation of programs that support their ideas and wishes. The passive recipient model, where parents have programs designed for them by well-meaning "experts," only perpetuates their feelings of isolation and helplessness. Using PSP's family-centered approach has brought a wonderful energy to ourprograms, where relationships are the strong foundation of a joyful community in which we all thrive and benefit.[3]

Using the PSP approach, family child care "clusters" within Save the Children's Neighborhood Child Care Network (NCCN) in Atlanta, Georgia, have experienced the benefits of family support firsthand. The integration of family support activities into clusters of family child care settings became a catalyst for creating a mutually supportive network of providers, parents, friends, and neighbors. Roberta Malavenda, Project Director, recalls that over time, the parents became more appreciative of their caregivers. When trust was finally established between parents and caregivers, parents realized that caregivers, like themselves, often felt pressured and short on time.

3. Janet DuBois-Mars, Executive Director, Marin County Child Development Programs. Conversation with the authors, May 28, 1996.

Parents also came to realize that if the caregivers felt good about themselves and had better tools to do their work, they would do a better job of relating to and caring for the children. This led to an unusual degree of parent support of the caregivers and their combined support of the community. One group of parents chose to use some of its activity funds to purchase items for the caregiver's home, playground equipment, and toner for the copier, and another group raised funds to send several caregivers on an overnight retreat. Together, parents, children, and caregivers bought and wrapped Christmas presents for children at a local hospital. According to Malavenda, "The stories of how PSP has made a difference go on and on, each reinforcing the fact that child care and family support are a natural fit."[4]

4. Roberta Malavenda, Project Director, Save the Children's Neighborhood Child Care Network. Conversation with the authors, May 28, 1996.

THE PARENT SERVICES PROJECT'S MAJOR TEACHING POINTS AND TRAINING METHODOLOGY

PSP's training manual for administrator, teacher, and parent teams, called Sharing the Vision, describes how to set up a PSP site. PSP calls implementing a new way of working with families anchored in the family support philosophy a "journey" and a "work of the heart that builds on relationships and permits us to touch each other on a personal level." Its training material, both theoretical and highly practical, covers a broad range of topics, including:

- Introducing people to the PSP concept
- Developing operational systems (record keeping, fundraising, evaluation)
- Involving staff (staff training and support, encouraging staff participation)
- Involving parents (building relationships and inclusive communities, encouraging parent participation)
- Nurturing leadership/empowerment and advocacy
- Building coalitions
- Defining and addressing hard issues

Training occurs in a variety of formats, including lectures, panel discussions, group discussions, small group challenges, brainstorming, role play, learning games, and multiple media. The following sections highlight some of the fundamental ideas behind the PSP approach.

CORE PRINCIPLES OF FAMILY SUPPORT AND STRATEGIES FOR WORKING WITH FAMILIES

The PSP approach is based on the philosophy that parents who possess a sense of competence and a feeling that they have something of value in themselves to contribute will enrich their children's lives, strengthen their families, and take more active roles in their communities. PSP's core principles reflect the program's recognition that the well-being and sense of significance of parents is of central importance to the healthy development of the child:

- Parents are the most important people to the child. They are the child's primary teachers, and they know the child best. The relationship between parents and teachers is one of equality and respect. The first priority of the PSP program is to establish and nurture this relationship as a mutually beneficial partnership.
- Parents are their own best advocates. They are decision makers on a collaborative team. Programs are non-prescriptive, with parents making their own choices about the services they want.
- Parents are assets — not barriers to overcome or work around. Programs build on their strengths, and success comes from promoting the excellence of others and fostering their belief in themselves.
- Programs are ethnically relevant and community-based. Each group defines its own priorities and develops services that reflect its "reality."
- Programs and services are voluntary rather than mandated. Seeking out services is seen as a sign of strength.
- Self-esteem, joy, hopefulness, confidence, and optimism are important elements of strong families. Social support networks are a crucial element in promoting individuals' happiness, healthiness, and productivity.

To position child care centers as family care centers, PSP recommends a concrete set of strategies for working with families:

- Provide on-site services. PSP is unusual among family support providers in utilizing the comfort and convenience of the early childhood setting to offer services and resources to the entire family.
- Create a climate of trust in a welcoming environment. Include everyone, exclude no one, and share the turf.
- Plan services jointly with parents. Let parents make their own "menu of services" from which to choose and remember that nothing is mandated.
- Make activities easily accessible and non-threatening. Do not focus on who will benefit from the services. Try to include free child care for all family members as well as food.
- Families honor teachers by letting them into their lives — value their confidence.
- Enhance self-esteem, zest, optimism; diminish stress, isolation, loneliness.

- Foster close ties; create a family atmosphere with language and style that is casual and intimate.
- Focus on building relationships based on mutual respect.

PSP's philosophy, principles, and strategies describe the intent of program activities, inspire actions of leaders and participants, and are the standard for measuring the quality of a program.

LEVELS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND SERVICES OFFERED

Parent involvement is the fundamental principle on which the PSP is grounded. Executive Director Ethel Seiderman says, "Fun is hot on this agenda. We have a good time with our kids and families. It is not about being social directors; the activities are the way we make connections and build spirit." PSP makes it as easy as possible for parents to participate, giving consideration to convenient scheduling, transportation, child care, and food.

PSP's menu of services provides for various styles of involvement and encourages parents and teachers to participate in a way that is comfortable to them. Activities that allow for an easy, non-threatening type of participation include movie nights, bingo games, or children's performances. These events encourage people to develop a positive feel for the center community and to take the first steps in becoming involved. Activities where some interaction takes place include family fun events, workshops, potluck suppers, and men's breakfasts. During these events, participants share themselves — their presence, experiences, ideas, and families. Activities that ask parents to take an active role in decision making and helping peers include planning committees and support groups, during which participants may take a leadership role and are willing to share personal information with others.

PSP programs welcome any level of parent involvement, from tentative beginnings to active enjoyment to leadership, as right for the individual at that time. The goal of parent involvement is to give participants opportunities to increase their self-esteem, build relationships with others, and become leaders of their own lives. To generate a wish list of family support activities, instead of asking parents, "What do you need?" programs ask, "What can we do together to make us stronger as parents and teachers, as family

and community?" As the examples below show, the possible menu of PSP's activities and services is extensive:

- **Family fun:** Planned events encouraging all family members to relax with their children, have fun with other families, and expand social networks include potluck dinners, holiday celebrations, sports events, craft nights, cultural affairs, and special group trips.
- **Adult activities/classes and workshops:** Opportunities for parents to nurture themselves or to learn practical skills include parent luncheons, men's groups, support groups, outlet shopping, parent education, family literacy, ethnic cooking, stress management, first aid, driver's education, and money management. The center provides or makes arrangements for child care.
- **Parents' time off:** Centers provide child care at no charge to parents in the evening or on weekends to allow parents time for themselves. Specifically, centers may offer regularly scheduled respite times, emergency care, sick child care, or parent babysitting co-ops.
- **Parent options fund:** With money earmarked for the parent group to determine the use of and to replenish, parents may give grants, scholarships, or loans and be involved in fundraising activities.
- **Leadership activities:** Planning and advocacy activities where parents provide input into the program and develop leadership skills include parent leadership committees, board meetings, parent policy councils, coalitions, and conferences.

ADOPTING A FAMILY SUPPORT APPROACH

Applying family support values and working in ways that respect and strengthen families is an ongoing process that requires teachers to reflect on and assess their child care practices. The attitude and paradigm shift from traditional non-family-centered to family-centered practices in the child care setting has a particularly great impact on teacher-parent communication and policy development. The following table highlights the value shift which guides the PSP approach.

"Traditional" Values	Family Support Values
The family alone is responsible for raising their children	Foster a community of support: It takes a village to raise a child
Seeking support is a sign of weakness	Seeking support is a sign of strength, the first step to getting what is needed
Deficit thinking ("what's missing?")	Builds on strengths
Exclusive; parents must prove they belong	Inclusive, multicultural; everyone is "in"
Parents are barriers to their child's development, defective in providing for their child; parents are passive vessels to pour information into	Parents are resources for their child and for the school community; parents count as decision makers and stakeholders
Parents are victims, beholden to experts who tell them what is good for them; program is expert-driven	Program fosters equality, joint ownership, partnership, and mutual contributions; it is participant-driven
Reactive — parents are receptors	Proactive — parents are active players
Crisis-oriented when intervention or prevention is needed	Promotes parents, encourages them to reach for their own excellence
When parents are poor, they shouldn't dream; they have to settle for less	Everyone has goals and dreams which can be developed and realized together

THREE PHASES OF TRAINING

Most current early childhood development curricula and training cultivate a child-centered focus. In general, when the child care field defines quality, emphasis is placed squarely on the relationship between teacher and child. This focus encourages teachers to view their role as defined only by the children they serve and the environment they create for them. Therefore, a

long-term commitment to redesign training at both preservice and inservice levels is required to link child care theory with family support principles.

PSP designed its training to support the efforts of child care sites to enhance their existing programs through the integration of family support practices and services. PSP's approach depends on ownership and participation by staff, administration, families, and the community from the initial decision to participate in PSP training to actual PSP implementation and evaluation. PSP stresses that moving toward family support is a process, which is reflected in its multi-phase training design:

- **Phase One: Planning and Ownership**
  Training teams provide presentations to orient staff, parents, and community members to the content and values of the program. Trainers help site leadership determine whether the PSP approach is a good fit. On-site visits enable training teams to learn about site culture and organization in order to tailor training to the audience.

- **Phase Two: Intensive Training**
  Teams from several sites participate in intensive training lasting from three to five days. Participants explore family support principles and learn concrete, practical strategies for integrating the PSP approach at their sites. Key sessions cover assessing family-centered practice, building respectful partnerships, building an inclusive community, developing leadership and advocacy skills, involving parents and staff, and involving males.

- **Phase Three: Start-up Implementation and Follow-up Training**
  Trainers conduct three on-site visits, follow-up training that presents opportunities to resolve issues raised during actual implementation. PSP links program leadership to local PSP coalitions, which support each other and share resources to create family-centered services.

FOUR KEY COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE TRAINING

Training processes that mirror family support principles: According to the PSP approach, just as family support principles and practices build on families' existing strengths, training in family support builds on trainees' strengths and experiences. Likewise, quality training happens when trainers facilitate participants' understanding and growth, just as child care teachers ultimately foster parents' development.

PSP believes that when families and teachers share their vulnerabilities and uncertainties, their relationship becomes stronger; the same is true for trainers and trainees. Sharing one's feelings departs from the traditional human services perspective, which encourages distance between players, especially where revealing one's concerns is seen as impairing the relationship or interfering with the "helping" role. The line between teacher and learner is fluid in PSP training; everyone can be both a teacher and a learner. Moreover, people come into training with a "full cup" of valid knowledge and experiences to be recognized and respected by others.

Traditional training formats often model deficit approaches, which view the learner as an empty vessel and train learners to implement a specific set of practices originating from a stated value system. PSP training avoids this cookie-cutter approach which implies that the teacher has all the answers. Instead, using a strength-based approach to training, trainers model respect for learners as their own best advocates and teachers. In this sharing of authority, a respectful relationship develops that mirrors the partnerships between teachers and parents so central to the family support approach.

PSP training guides participants to the discovery that they are not learning how to change parents, but rather how to change themselves to work effectively with parents. PSP's training formats reflect an understanding of adult learning styles. Training incorporates visits to PSP sites, giving trainees firsthand access to active programs that model supportive environments for children, families, and teachers. Participants hear speakers who are immersed in PSP programs, giving participants the opportunity to analyze what the principles of family support mean and how

those principles interact in practice with their own values and knowledge. Trainers also use anecdotes and case studies as a way to connect family support principles to real life experiences and challenges. The trainers provide ample time for discussion and reflection as participants grapple with new ideas and ways of applying them toward enhancing their child care programs.

Just as family-supportive programs focus on building respectful relationships, PSP training aims for participants to develop relationships and support networks among themselves. During PSP's intensive training, participants who initially may be strangers become members of a learning, nurturing community. By reflecting on their own diverse backgrounds and experiences throughout the course of the training, participants develop an understanding of group process and learn from having direct experience with family support principles.

The following table summarizes how PSP training models family support principles and practice.

PSP Training for Family Support

Principle of Family Support	Training Practices
Respect for individuals and their primary importance in the process of positive change	Relate to learners in ways that show respect. Establish a safe, comfortable climate for learning. Use active learning techniques such as dialogue and role play; use personal experiences as a resource for exploring issues. Acknowledge hard issues as they arise.
Building on strengths	Use participants' views and experiences as the starting point for training. Help individuals identify their own strengths, as well as their program's current strengths and resources. Use group interaction and networking to achieve learning goals.

Continued

Continued

Focus on forming respectful relationships	Position the trainer as a partner, not "the expert." Be flexible about the length of classes and other logistics, showing concern for learners' needs. Share vulnerabilities, decreasing distance between learners and trainers. Be honest about the challenges, and begin relationships that continue after training.
Importance of social support networks	Provide opportunities for building relationships through introductory exercises, mealtimes, and group work. Use the training environment as an emotional and intellectual support system for trainees.
Respect for differences among cultures and individuals	Encourage dialogue and a wealth of viewpoints. Use translators and translated materials when appropriate. Adapt training scenarios to reflect the concerns of the participants and their communities.
Shared leadership and decision making	Demonstrate flexibility with the training agenda. Check in with learners periodically, probing their thoughts and reactions. Include parents and teachers in the training team. Use a trainer skilled in group process as a facilitator.

Teaching how to build relationships with families: PSP recognizes that child care teachers have a vital role in defining and maintaining partnerships with parents. No matter how many services a program provides or how noble the organizational mission, the front-line teachers' attitudes and the nature of their day-to-day interactions with families determine whether those services are used, parents feel welcome, and a sense of community is established.

PSP training prepares teachers to build relationships with families by telling trainees to ask themselves, "Who am I in the lives of children? And who am I in the lives of their families"? This

element of training helps learners develop an understanding of the teacher role as it relates to families and other adults in a child's life. At the same time, training focuses on their own personal and professional values, as well the values of the program for which they work, to help them become aware of how these values and family support principles interact and affect their work with families.

The skills needed to build respectful relationships with families grow more complex when diverse histories and cultures meet. Each person, whether staff member, parent, or family member, brings subjective perceptions to the relationships that a program forges. Just as significant, parents and teachers often have different childrearing practices, communication styles, and problem-solving methods. Therefore, PSP training includes topics that aid in the development of the "people" skills that teachers need to work in partnership with families, helping learners develop strategies for building inclusive child care communities and resolving difficult issues that arise from language and cultural differences.

Stressing the importance of creating a supportive organizational climate for change: Quality preservice training cultivates self-understanding through an awareness of one's own personal and professional values, and imparts family support theory. The next step is to connect theory and practice, translating the principles of family support to the child care environment. The PSP experience demonstrates that moving toward family support can be accomplished when presented as a multilevel effort owned and supported by administrators, teachers, and parents.

If family support training occurs in isolation from the work environment, enthusiasm for change may decline sharply when participants return to work and find little support for change from coworkers and administrators. Teachers who embrace family support principles may find themselves alone if colleagues and working environments do not embrace similar views. For instance, advocating for parents may be seen in a negative light by fellow teachers or supervisors not trained in family support, who may question the loyalties of a teacher acting according to family support principles. Consequently, that teacher might find it difficult to sustain enthusiasm for a family support approach.

PSP recognizes that individual training must go hand-in-hand with organizational change for the family support approach to reach its potential for family and community betterment. Sanction for this kind of training needs to come from committed leadership, because without such endorsement, sabotage and other covert barriers to change may develop. Principles and practices of family support not only shift the focus of individual teachers, but they also motivate entire programs to change from being child-centered to family-centered. More than just restating the message that a program sends to families, this shift requires a willingness to make changes in how a program views itself and operates.

Viewing training as an ongoing process: Because understanding family support principles requires reflection and looking at practices in the context of the daily routine to see how they relate to one's role in the child care field, PSP eschews one-shot training. Indeed, PSP follows up its intensive training with on-site training scheduled over a period of time, giving teachers an opportunity to talk about experiences, practices, personal and professional values, and the philosophies of their respective organizations. PSP training anticipates and supports the capacity for trainees to take leadership roles in promoting the PSP approach in their sites, agencies, and communities. Staff meetings also serve as training opportunities, providing time for groups to think about the center's values and attitudes and to focus on what it means to provide family support.

PSP emphasizes the importance of building a supportive learning environment that extends from the center to the community. The program urges leaders from PSP-trained programs, practitioners and parents alike, to stay in touch with each other by forming or participating in community initiatives, professional child care networks, and regional family support coalitions. PSP trainees thus continue a practical education with their colleagues, giving each other moral support, sharing resources, and conducting joint training activities and advocacy efforts.

PARENT SERVICES PROJECT COALITIONS: CREATING CENTER-SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

During training, PSP urges centers to become members of local or regional PSP coalitions, which are meant to be sources of inspiration, information, resources, and enthusiasm. The benefits of belonging to a PSP coalition mirror PSP's payoff for families and provide:

- **Assessment:** Each agency can compare its program to others, assuring themselves that their services continue to have integrity and value. Program participants gain understanding and insights from others, thus helping them avoid programmatic dead ends or the feeling of being alone with a troublesome issue.
- **Network for sharing:** The structure of a coalition, which encourages agencies to adapt ideas, materials, strategies, and resources freely, enhances services to families by sharing successes.
- **Support:** Being part of a collective strengthens each participant. Everyone in the group helps each other see his or her own issues in a new perspective.
- **Base for social change:** Regular meetings keep members informed of public policy issues. When there is a need for action, the united coalition can mobilize quickly as a strong advocate for parents, families, and children.

The concept of agencies supporting each other as members of a coalition — acting like members of an extended family — is basic to the PSP philosophy. Membership in a coalition with neighboring PSP agencies can help new programs get off the ground; mentorship aids new projects through the early stages of implementation. The goal for the coalition is to meet regularly, sharing accomplishments and effective practices — as well as hurdles. The coalition is also a convenient forum for coordination of follow-up training.

CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENTING FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

The willingness to make the shift from child care to family care is only a first step in implementing a family support approach. Instituting the individual and organizational changes needed to deliver family support brings an array of challenges to the fore. Most challenges relate to defining relationships between teachers and parents (such as working out issues of authority) or to program-level issues (such as overworked staff and underfunded programs).

PSP training informs teachers and parents that they can easily identify the emotional responses that accompany hard issues such as stereotypes, bias, and racism: People confronting these usually experience discomfort and a reluctance to say what is on their minds. These are the issues that teachers and parents dance around; resolving them requires discussions that some hope to avoid. But left unattended, these issues make teachers and participants feel unsettled and may undermine the trust essential for people to work well together.

PSP's principles of family support provide guidelines for dealing with these hard issues — and give programs both the permission and the responsibility to meet difficult and sensitive situations head on. PSP positions these principles as a starting point, an agreed-upon foundation on which child care teachers and parents can build and create program unity of mission. The following table highlights examples and strategies used in training to explore hard issues and is followed by a discussion of two major challenges to implementing family support and ways in which the principles of family support can be a vehicle for action and change.

PSP Training Strategies and Principles

Example Situation	Analysis	Guiding Principles	Training Strategy
A parent comes in to volunteer at the center. She shares that she has had experience in the classroom. The teacher greets the volunteer as "Johnny's mom" and tells the parent how busy she is with special projects she has planned for the day. She asks the parent to do the breakfast dishes and then observe from the corner.	This example reveals problems of yielding and sharing the territory of the classroom with parents. The parent volunteer brings resources to the classroom that are not utilized and seem unrespected. The decisions are made by the teacher, who closely guards her turf.	Parents bring strengths and resources and are decision makers on a collaborative team. Success comes from promoting the excellence of others and fostering belief in themselves.	Discuss the impact this incident may have on building a respectful partnership. Ask how using the guiding principles would create a different outcome. Examine how family support principles relate to using parent volunteers and how teachers create a welcoming and inclusive climate.
Two parents share their concern that the Spanish-speaking families seem to cluster together. They do not want funds to pay for support groups and workshops facilitated in Spanish. They believe that these activities encourage Spanish-speaking families to maintain separation. The teacher is unsure of what to do.	This situation raises issues of power — who has input and makes decisions that have an impact on individuals in the group — as well as bias, exclusivity, and a lack of cultural understanding. The teacher's challenge is to facilitate an understanding that services build on strengths (such as one's language) even though the program values and promotes an inclusive community.	The relationship between individuals is one of equality and respect. Programs are ethnically relevant and community - based.	Discuss how these concerns affect the center community. Explore how all the players feel about the types of services offered. Look at what ground rules and agreed-upon goals have been established for making decisions and what can be done to build an inclusive community.
The parent leadership group has organized an adults-only outing that costs $5 per person. One parent has expressed a strong desire to go on this outing but says she cannot afford it. Some members of the parent group want to find a way for her to come; others say only those who can pay may participate.	This dilemma raises issues of inclusion/ exclusion. Individuals may wrongly conclude that they are unwanted. The solution is for the parent leadership group to set a policy that shows fairness and compassion, strengthening support networks.	We must embrace and feel honored to have the richness of diversity around us. Social support networks are a central element in promoting the well-being of all. Unique needs of each group can be met within the context of the larger group without excluding anyone.	Explore personal histories. Form small groups and ask participants to share their earliest recollections of being made to feel excluded, different, or discriminated against. Allow time for people to gather their thoughts and then share their stories. When each person has shared, ask participants to explore what they are feeling and share how they might respond to this situation in a different way.

Creating a climate of equity and partnership with parents: One reason the child care field may express reluctance to move toward family support is that the teaching profession has never held an elevated position of power or authority in the United States. Child care teachers have a strong interest in having the value of their profession recognized and have worked hard to cultivate a sense of esteem both within the field and in society. But because work with children may not be taken as seriously as teachers feel it should be, teachers guard the turf on which they feel secure and hesitate to share what power they have. Unfortunately, this behavior may be manifest in an aloofness that inhibits teachers from working with families.

In other cases, due to the long hours they spend with children, teachers may view themselves as substitute or surrogate parents, compensating for the time and love of working parents. Often teachers see themselves (not the parents) as experts on the children in their care. This notion of replacing the parent or knowing better than the parent can alienate teachers from parents, discourage joint decision making, and drive a wedge into the caregiving partnership.

PSP training coaches child care teachers in how to deal with these issues of authority with the following assertions:

- As programs work to build trust and create a sense of equality among participants, sharing power and control with parents may be a difficult process for administrators and teachers. Moreover, accepting power and responsibility can be challenging for participants unused to such opportunities. Hierarchies will prevail unless programs work toward shifting specific perceptions and policies that impede a family-centered approach.
- Because undervalued teachers sometimes feel a need to hold on to the difference in status between themselves and parents, they may resist parents participating as equals. However, PSP believes that integrating family support practices into the child care setting in fact elevates the status of the child care field, increasing the respect that child care professionals receive.
- Teachers who are respected and who hold a fundamental sense of their own worth are those best able to build partnerships with families. PSP wants child care teachers to perceive themselves, by virtue of their training and experience, as

resources to children and their families, as role models and mentors to parents.

- Embracing principles of family support means creating an equal playing field, where parents are included as experts and have equal access to information that can promote the well-being of their children.
- The significance of child care teachers in the lives of children is not diminished as programs honor the importance of parents. The relationship between teacher and child, however, is temporary. Children are primarily connected to their families and their lives revolve around them. Reaffirming parents as the principal constant in their children's lives enhances, rather than demeans, the role of the child care teacher in children's lives.
- As child care professionals let parents share in shaping a family support environment, they frequently see what is lost rather than what can be gained. It is a major and courageous leap to embrace the excellence of others, giving them an opportunity to shine and become part of the decision-making process. Teachers need to keep in mind that the potential of each individual strengthens the potential of the group.

Instituting a family support approach: A key challenge in implementing a family support approach is getting child care teachers to embrace new attitudes about their roles; otherwise, the goal of moving toward an environment of family support is seen as "just one more thing to do." Many teachers and other program staff feel stress due to heavy workloads and inadequate compensation. After working with children all day, teachers may feel they do not have the time or energy to give to family support activities.

Time is a precious commodity for many child care programs, for both individual teachers and programs as a whole. Especially as child care makes the shift to a family support model, time is needed for dialogue and reflection on a program's family support principles and practices. Programs also must find time to develop and run family-centered events, as well as to collaborate with community groups to share family support resources. But most importantly, time is essential for building relationships, the cornerstone of family support programs.

Staffing is a pressing problem for child care programs attempting to integrate family support. As programs replicate PSP, they must consider who will take additional responsibility for working with parent leadership groups in planning activities and meeting with families. Other issues include finding staff to provide child care during parent activities — without exploiting a program's limited pool of child care teachers. While each program arrives at different solutions reflecting its unique circumstances, players, and needs, planning around the ubiquitous time and resource shortage is critical to a program's ability to sustain the family support effort.

PSP offers the following advice and examples for child care programs to balance the short supply and overwhelming demand for time and resources:

- For child care centers, the key starting places for interacting with families are pick-up and drop-off times. Although one study found that the typical center-based child care teacher sees a parent approximately 13.7 minutes each week[5] and that encouraging staff to spend more time with parents may seem to undermine keeping careful watch over children, the morning and evening transitions, however brief, are critical to establishing a rapport with parents.
- A common concern for both parents and teachers is the availability of space and hours of operation. In general, child care centers are closed evenings and weekends, the very times when families can participate more easily in activities. If programs schedule activities and involvement when parents are unavailable, attendance will be poor. Rather than finding out what might work better for parents, teachers sometimes conclude from the lack of attendance that they are not interested. Opening the doors beyond traditional hours of operation clears the way for the involvement of working parents.
- Helping staff integrate a family-centered approach is a process that requires a long-term commitment to staff development. The first step is to recognize the many ways in which staff already support families and to build on practices already in

5. Larner, M. (1995). *Linking family support and early childhood programs: Issues, experiences, opportunities* (p. 10). Chicago: Family Resource Coalition Best Practices Project.

place. Then programs need to allocate time and resources to increasing staff members' understanding of the PSP principles and approach. Successful programs work to build ownership among all players; for a co-equal partnership to emerge between child care teachers and parents, staff empowerment is as important as empowering parents. Teachers are less likely to resist change if programs set aside regular times for training, meetings, and informal staff get-togethers. Program leaders need to look for creative ways to support child care teachers so they can embrace this new way of working.

- Child care centers need to learn to take advantage of different opportunities for receiving family support assistance. For instance, child care clusters in Georgia's Save the Children's Neighborhood Child Care Network (NCCN) share a program coordinator who supports teachers and parents in planning and implementing activities. The Families and Centers Empowered Together (FACET) program in Delaware receives a grant providing funds to centers to employ a family specialist. In Florida, central agency staff responsible for subsidized child care in that state provides technical assistance at various sites to parent and staff leadership groups, which in turn implement programs locally.

Napa Valley Child Care Center in California, a small nonprofit site without special funding for staffing family support activities, illustrates another means of delivering family support. Staff members rotate their work shifts in order to help coordinate family events during evenings and weekends, while an official family liaison does the budgeting, enrollment, food program, and office tasks. The liaison concedes that PSP brings additional responsibilities and is not always easy to carry out. Teachers' lives are busy, and, like the parents, they come to some events but not all. "But," she says, "we all believe that family support is part of quality care. Family support makes it easier to do quality care because it helps us to build a bond with the family. You become friends. You are able to talk about things. The program is for all of us."[6]

6. Artemisa Medina, Family Liaison, Napa Valley Child Care Center. Conversation with the authors, May 17, 1996.

Ultimately, the success of integrating family support into child care settings lies in programs' ability to remain steadfast in creating family-friendly environments, identifying family and teacher strengths and drawing on those from other sources, and remembering that in the process of change opportunities for progress occur.

Child care in the United States is a complex hodgepodge of programs and settings — private and public, in-home and center-based, and licensed and unlicensed. Researchers, policymakers, teachers, and parents alike point to the substantial gaps, flaws, and inadequacies of the current child care policy and funding system. Subsidies to working parents and participants in welfare reform initiatives have huge waiting lists. Rates of funding are insufficient to support quality services or a stable, well-trained workforce.[7] Thus, despite a compelling case for linking family support and child care, substantial challenges must be met in order to strengthen the ability of the child care system to move toward family support.

The goals of the family support approach are to increase the capacity of families to nurture their children and enable parents to become better equipped to make positive changes into their lives. Although PSP's approach does not attempt to solve all the problems that families face, the attitude of family support is positive: All families have strengths; parents are one of the best resources for themselves and others; and parents will resolve many of their own issues when provided with the proper tools. A goal of family support programs like PSP is to develop a climate where family strengths are building blocks for growth and positive change.

The staff at PSP believe that the potential and need for linking family support and child care are undeniable: A family-centered approach complements a child-centered philosophy. PSP tries to convey clearly and convincingly the message that child care programs have a significant role in the support of families and thus are a vital part of their communities. The child care field must express a tenacious commitment to motivate legislators to

7. Lopez, M. E., & Schultz, T. (1995, September). Early childhood reform: Local innovations in a flawed policy system. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 60-63.

enact family-supportive policies at the federal, state, and local levels to ensure appropriate guidelines are developed and programs receive necessary resources.

PSP believes that if the U.S. child care system embraced family support more widely, a ripple effect would occur. As child care teachers worked with families, other community groups would become aware of the advantages of this alternate means of service delivery and look to child care centers as logical family support locales. More importantly, more families would experience the benefits of a caring community, where their voices would be respected and their contributions appreciated. Parents would come to know that their involvement was vital to their children's well-being and that they must be advocates for their children in their schools and neighborhoods. Together, parents and teachers would be a critical mass of believers in family-centered child care, striving to influence public policy and the direction of systemic change. It is in this atmosphere that the country can begin to feel hopeful and confident of making the betterment of children and their families its highest priority.

Harvard Family Research Project
38 Concord Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138
Tel: (617) 495-9108
Fax: (617) 495-8594
E-Mail: HFRP@HUGSE1.HARVARD.EDU
WWW: http://hugse1.harvard.edu/~hfrp